

CHRISTIAN DEATH:
ITS ANTHROPOLOGICAL, CHRISTOLOGICAL,
AND ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

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(An Abstract)

"It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute (G.S.18)." These words were written by the Fathers of Vatican II, speaking to the modern world and stating this fact of man's anxiety. *Death from the beginning till now has always posed a serious problem for man. Death is something that is inevitable for him... something all men could not escape from. Death is inscribed in the destiny of every man.*

To this fearful apprehension man can react in two ways. He could see death in an *atheistic or fatalistic way* wherein human life would have no reasonable destiny, or he could choose to see death in a *Christian way* where one realizes his inability to understand this problem and eventually turns to divine revelation to give a fitting solution.

Divine revelation becomes of help in unveiling little by little that positive hidden plan of God for each of us. So much so that now, *death as a biological event* or phenomenon not only proves man's materiality which is bound sooner or later to corrupt, but also demonstrates man's finiteness in relation to his infinite Creator. Also, seeing *death in the historical order* we find its entry into the world via the sins of our first parents (Gen.2-3). Not that their lives would not have terminated had they not sinned, but that rather death as a consequence of their sin now becomes intrinsically connected with separation from God. Death as we know it now, as part of man's constitution subject to concupiscence, in darkness, weakness and obscurity regarding its actual nature, is the consequence of sin (Rom.5:12 ff).

God who is all good and would like to save man at all cost could not just erase death by pretending that man's sin never actually happened because he respects man's freedom. And so the fact of sin and its consequence - death - must remain. However, *God can change its internal meaning.* But the change could not be by just looking at it from the outside. The very nature itself of death must be changed so that it could lead to God rather than away from Him.

And so Christ, the Son of God, assumed a human nature subject also to death by man's sins. And because Christ freely accepted death according to His Father's will, His death now becomes the highest sacrifice of total self-giving and surrender, since this death belonged to the second person of the Divinity. Christ's gift of self in death was accepted by the Father who raised Him up from it thereby giving Him a claim of victory over it. *In Christ then, death's meaning has now been totally transformed.*

It is true that death will still appear dark and forbidding as it is approached by man because it is still a consequence of sin. But now death becomes no longer a punishment for sin. Death now manifests God's redemptive purpose as it becomes for a Christian an object of humble acceptance. But for this same Christian, it is not just an automatic consequence of Christ's death and rising, it must also be the *culminating result of the whole supernatural and sacramental life of the Christian.* But if man wills autonomously to understand and master *this* death, due to original sin and beyond his clear power of control, which he accomplishes as a personal action throughout his life, his death becomes the *culmination of sin.*

Death therefore is a consummation, an accomplishment which puts the final seal on the moral orientation of man's life.

Death being both a consequence of sin and an event of Salvation through Christ leads us to two articles of faith: (1) the *irrevocable fixing of our lot* at the moment of death; (2) the necessary *cooperation of our liberty* in our salvation or damnation.

Since at the moment of death, the soul is separated from the body, the soul now ceases to act in a fundamentally changeable way and begins to act with an intrinsically unchangeable intention of some concrete last end. If a man dies in Christ, his intention is forever directed to God. If a man dies rejecting Christ, this intention is forever turned to oneself in rebellion to God. Our problem now is: how does man fix his unchangeable direction toward this last end? Does man freely opt *only at the moment of death* thereby giving the possibility of a man with a sinful life to submit to God only in this moment of death (final option theory); or does his last act consist only of a *summation of all the free acts* as he has placed throughout his entire life?

Theologians have valid reasons for both. But as we go on investigating this problem we only come to a fuller realization that a Christian must become more and more *assimilated in Christ throughout his life* that he may be so during the moment of his death. Conformation then to the death of Christ, anticipated throughout his life in faith and sacraments becomes a final blessed dying in the Lord in which the experience of the end becomes the dawn of perfect fulfillment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.1 THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 18). These words were written by the Fathers of Vatican II, speaking to the modern world stating this fact of man's anxiety. Death from the beginning until now has always posed a serious problem for man. Death is something inevitable for him, something all men could not escape from. Death is inscribed in the destiny of every man.

And yet it is one event which he fears most and considers most absurd since it always finds man in some sense incomplete, his potentialities unrealized, the full resources of his personality untapped and his plans unfulfilled.

To this fearful apprehension man can react in two ways. He could either see death in an atheistic or fatalistic way wherein human life would have no reasonable destiny, or he could choose *to see death in a Christian way* where one realizes his inability to understand this problem and eventually turns to divine revelation to give a fitting solution.

It is in this second way that I would like to develop this thesis on "Death." *How can death be seen in a Christian way?* Here divine revelation becomes of help in unveiling little by little,

though never fully in this life, this mystery of Christian faith called death, which falls within God's divine plan of love for each one of us.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since death could not be reproduced "in vitro," each one of us must face it personally. But just as an outside help, like a doctor can assist a dying person but cannot enter with him into his actual death, this thesis desires to accompany you and assist you in whatever way it can in your journey towards earthly life's final end. The paper is a *Synthesis* of what has been learned about "Death" through the various subjects (Christian Anthropology, Christology, Eschatology) in a four year theological course. Thus the *Synthesis* gives an almost complete treatment of "Death" using the different disciplines of Sacred Theology. This thesis hopes to help you see death in a Christian way, not as a bleak termination of life, but as the beginning of an eternal life in God.

1.3 SCOPE AND LIMITATION

We shall see in the second chapter the origin of death in man and its effects on him; hence, we deal with the *anthropological* dimension of death. The third chapter will show how the nature of death is transformed intrinsically by Christ into something that would lead man towards God rather than away from him. This is the *Christological* dimension of death. Finally the fourth chapter will deal specifically with the *eschatological* dimension of death. This chapter will try to delve deeper into man's very moment of death and explore the different implications of this final and most important event in the life of man. Our study of "Death" shall then be limited to its view via Christian Anthropology, Christology, and Eschatology.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The thesis shall make use of the *Expository-Speculative* method. It will make use for its sources Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, Church teachings and Conciliar documents, and view points of various Catholic theologians then and now, in presenting the different dimensions of Christian death.

1.5 SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n.1013) tells us that: "Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny." Furthermore the Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the litany of the saints, she has us pray: "From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord."

In the Liturgy of the Church, the Christian vision of death receives a privileged expression: "Lord for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven." (Roman Missal, Preface of Christian Death I)

For a Christian, his Catechism and his liturgy are daily and ordinary sources of his spiritual knowledge and growth. The excerpts we have quoted from these two sources of our faith inspire us to discover more deeply the true meaning of death for a Christian. But since they could not fully answer all our questions, they invite us to search further through the rich treasures of the Church's writings and to drink from its effervescent fount of traditions.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Divine Revelation is God's making Himself known to man in various times and in various places, and in various ways (Bible, Salvation History, Prophets, Traditions).

Christian Anthropology is a branch of theology which deals with the study of man in his origins and in his early relations with God his creator (cf. fall of Adam and Eve).

Christology is a branch of theology which deals with the study of the person of Jesus Christ (two natures of man and God) and his role in the history of salvation.

Eschatology is a branch of theology which deals with the study of the Last Things (death, judgment, heaven, hell).

Death is defined in our study not just as the termination of the biological life or the cessation of an organic equilibrium, but also as a consummation or an accomplishment which puts the final seal on the moral orientation of man's life.

Penalty refers to the punishment due to sin.

Fathers of the Church (Patrology) refer to the early Church writings and authors immediately after the period of the apostles down to Gregory the Great (d.604) or Isidore of Seville (d.636) in the West, and John of Damascus (d.740) in the East.

Massa Condemnata (the condemned) refers to the state constituted by original sin to which most men are left by God's just justice.

Conciliar Documents refer to writings produced from assemblies of representatives of the universal Church for mutual consultations and for reaching decisions in Church affairs, usually convoked by the Pope.

Synoptics refer to the three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Recapitulation is the theory of St. Irenaeus which states that mankind regains through Christ what it lost through Adam. (Against Heresies 3,18,7)

Exchange theory was also developed by St. Irenaeus, stating that human nature was restored because God the Son took our nature unto Himself. (Against Heresies 3,19,1)

Satisfaction refers to St. Anselm's theory that the moral acts of Christ, in consequence of the infinite dignity of his divine person, have an infinite value and can thus "satisfy" or pay for the gravity of an offense of a creature to God.

Apocatastasis is Origen's doctrine of "universal restoration" holding that after death, God offered man still another chance of conversion and that on his part man would be unable to remain in opposition to God when the truth became apparent to him.

Final Option Theory holds that man freely opt only at the moment of death thereby giving the possibility of a man with a sinful life to submit to God only in this moment of death.

Summation of Earlier Free Acts Theory argue that the choices made daily during one's lifetime eventually shape up into a fundamental decision for or against God at the moment of death.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF DEATH

2.1 UNIVERSALITY AND INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

Nowadays there is a universal clamor for experience, accompanied by an instinctive reluctance to accept anything exclusively on the basis of past tradition or blind faith. But somehow experience alone will never be able to solve the impenetrable mystery of death. For one who experiences death never lives to tell of it. Human experience can only shout loud and clear that death is inevitable and that all men and women without a single exception are heading for the cold finality of death. If human experience then is our only guide, then we could see that death is nothing but destruction and nothingness, the gate to perfect annihilation and subsequent oblivion.

Our obvious Christian reaction to this then is an attitude of watchfulness, of ever present readiness to receive the final summons to the abyss of the beyond, a summons that to many might come with shocking suddenness. This makes us bear in mind all the time that death is the great leveler that spares no one, king or beggar, saint or sinner, young or old; one is bound to depart sooner or later from this world as naked as when one first stepped into it.

Obviously experience shows us one face of death which is most negative as an aspect of mere dissolution and destruction. But where experience stops, here our Christian faith takes over, for it is only faith that sheds light beyond the realm of experience and illumines the deeper dimension of death. (1)

The universality and the inevitability of death is one of the affirmations of faith. This proposition which we have previously seen to be knowable through a process of empirical induction could also be knowable by reason of its source in divine revelation (2). It is also through this revelation that we shall investigate the cause of death's universality and necessity.

In Scripture, death is described from the biological viewpoint as the coming to an end of the human life force; however it is also seen as an act of God, the judgment of God upon sinful mankind, the consequence of sin. (3)

2.2 DEATH AS THE NATURAL END OF A BIOLOGICAL PROCESS

Death is the termination of the biological life, the definitive cessation of an organic equilibrium. This could be traced from man's obvious affinity with the material world. He possesses an organic structure modified and perfected through many centuries of development and adaptation. This structure draws support from an environment that manifests the cycle of birth, growth, development and death. It is characteristic of any living individual to go through such maturing process during which it is benefited by its environment and at the same time contributes some benefit to this same surrounding. And when completed it yields in death to other individuals to continue the process. As such, any living being subject to time has an end.

However, man's death is distinguishable from a mere animal in the sense that each man is individually aware of death's inevitability. This awareness then enables him to transcend himself and an infinity of freely chosen values lies open to him when confronted by death's impending reality. Such awareness then enables him to see clearer his affinity with the material universe and illuminates his essential relationship to God. Before the necessity of dying, his pretense to self-sufficiency crumbles. He recognizes his radical difference from God and his complete

dependence on him. This fact emphasizes that man's destiny is not ultimately in his own limited hands but in God's. Here man must be willing to trust his death to God even as he trusts his life to Him. This confidence in the face of darkness and obscurity is the earliest religious attitude of the Hebrews towards death. (4)

A fairly ancient and protracted trend in Scripture, particularly visible in the Old Testament, is the view that considers death as the natural outcome of a man's life, a purely biological occurrence totally unconnected with sin. Death is conceived as an event common to all men as well as to all other living organisms.

In the book of Genesis, in the section on the patriarchs, it states that: "Abraham breathed his last, dying at a ripe old age, grown old after a full life; and he was taken to his kinsmen" (Gen. 25:8). This same expression is reiterated for Ishmael (Gen. 25:17), Isaac (Gen. 35:29), and Jacob (Gen. 49:33). Here we find man submitting to an inevitable event which could not be disputed. A quiet trust in God pervades all these passages where it does not occur to the writer any notion of a life after death nor of sin as connected with physical death. Man simply dies "to rest with his ancestors." This is said of Moses (Dt. 32:50), David (2 Sam. 7:12), Solomon (1 K 14:20). In this perspective all that man can hope for is to die "in a good old age" (Jg. 8:32) with serenity. Life for them was a gift of God. But it was not less truly a gift just because it had an end. (5)

It is a fact that the certitude and necessity of death belongs to the necessary features of human existence and that it will never be abolished. However it is noteworthy to recall that although man's existence came from God, death did not come from Him. The Book of Wisdom explicitly states: "God did not make death, nor does He rejoice in the destruction of the living; God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature He made him... But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it" (Wis. 1:13;

2:23-24). So it can be said that even if there is a natural explanation of the universality and inevitability of death, these natural causes of death would not have been able to operate in the condition of man in the garden of Eden, because of an exceptional gift of God. Consequently even the free operation of the natural causes of death can be traced to a cause in the moral and spiritual history of man. Though its execution occurs through a natural process, death in actual human history has an ultimate and special cause. Death is a consequence of original sin, of man's free acceptance of the temptation to evil (6). God permitted this sin and its consequences, and in His loving wisdom draws good from it.

2.3 DEATH AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

Death is for man considered as biological reality, a perfectly normal event. And so man should not rebel at this mortal condition. But oftentimes we find death with a tragic and rebellious character. This is not simply because man is an immortal spirit in perishable flesh. If many people object to the unreasonableness of death it is because originally man was called by grace to share in the blissful immortality of God. Thus death, which in itself is normal as a biological event, does not in fact become intelligible until it is related to the mystery of sin, which has despoiled us of the privilege of immortality. (7)

2.3.1 DEATH'S ORIGIN IN GENESIS

The story of man's creation and fall can be found in Genesis chapters 2-3. These chapters belong to the most ancient religious traditions of Israel. Here the sacred writer strives to explain the universal phenomenon of sin and death in the world:

God is the living and holy Lord, how can death and wickedness have a place in his work? These things cannot belong to His original plan and intention. God is therefore shown as taking special care in the creation of man, breathing life into him, extending to him, in a condition of primitive innocence, a life of close union with Himself. To live is to share what belongs by right and in its fullness to the Living God alone. So long as man maintains his union with the Living God, he shall never lose the gift of life. But if he turns from God in disobedience, then loss of life is inevitable. The spirit of wickedness tempted man to independence of God and man yielded to this illusion and estranged himself from God. As a result, man is cut off from the living God and made subject to corruption and death. (8)

This was how sin came into the world and with it - death.

2.3.2 DEATH AS PENALTY FOR ORIGINAL SIN

2.3.2.1 FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

The early Apostolic Fathers commonly accept human death as a result of sin (9). The early Apologists too are unanimous with the statement of the Apostolic Fathers with some differences in their interpretation.

Justin, in his Dialogue with Trypho, 5, explains that the divine intention was that human persons live eternally, and that therefore God created human souls immortal. The freedom from suffering and death depended however on obedience to God's commandments, and disobedience brought about death. All human persons since Adam's fall would be subject to decay if they were not kept in existence by God, to be rewarded finally with eternal life or to be punished and then annihilated (10). Theophilus agrees with Justin in seeing death as a consequence of sin (11). Athenagoras views death as the "concomitant of a needy and corruptible existence" and is best compared to sleep (12). Tatian teaches that the human person was first created immortal, not with the very nature of the good which is God's alone, but able to achieve good through free choice.

Adam's sin lost the more powerful spirit which gives life to the soul in the Word, that is, the image and likeness of God, and the human race became mortal (13).

Later in the third century AD we find the other Greek Fathers like Clement of Alexandria teaching that Adam's sin was lack of docility; he refused to pay heed to God's command. He identifies this sin as the cause of human mortality and Christ's death as that which makes human immortality possible. Despite Adam's sin, the human person is given at creation the image of God - the intellect - the image which is never completely erased by personal sin. It is the source of the ineradicable yearning for God which causes some to be educated to contemplation and immortality, the diametrical opposite of the eternal death of sin (14).

Origen was traditional in teaching the two-fold death of the Christian - that of the body, the result of Adam's sin and that of the soul, the result of personal sin. It has been said that for Origen, salvation history could only be understood in terms of the loss and restoration of relative immortality. (15)

Methodius sees death as the means by which sin will be destroyed and the perfection of the earthly life will be achieved: " God the builder, by the timely application of death, checked man, his own temple, when he had sinned, in order that the flesh, when sin is withered and dead, may, like a restored temple, be raised up again with the same parts, uninjured and immortal, while sin is utterly destroyed." (16)

Gregory of Nyssa also believes that man is born with a miserable state (including mortality) because of Adam's fault, but without any true moral sin. John Chrysostom, too, describes the consequences of the fall that affects mankind, but he nevertheless does not accept sin to be hereditary. (17)

Among the Latin Fathers, Tertullian holds that Adam had a similarity to God according to nature and through grace. The second is lost with the fall, and it carries with it death and some other penalties. St. Cyprian for the first time uses the word "vulnera" or wounds, which include death, received because of Adam's sin. (18)

Augustine was clearest, most adamant and frequently vehement in his assertion that the bodily death of the human person is the result of Adam's sin. He wrote in "Against Fortunatus":

The law of death is that by which it was said to the first man, you are dust and unto dust you shall return, for we are all born of him in that state because we are dust and we shall return to dust as punishment for the sin of the first man. (19)

Not only did Adam's sin bring about human bodily mortality, but as Augustine worked out his theories of sin and grace, he came to trace the death of the soul, which is the condition of all human persons without the grace of Christ (state of generic sin) to that primal sin. In original sin, Adam's sin not only hurt him but also his descendants. All children of Adam became solidaries with him in his fault and they form a "massa damnata" or "massa peccati" not only in regard to the consequences of sin but to a state of sin.

Man participates in both the "reatus culpae" (guilt) and the "reatus poenae" (punishment) although the distinction between these two is present. After Baptism, original sin is erased together with the "reatus culpae" but concupiscence and death as "reatus poenae" remain. (20)

2.3.2.2 CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS

In the 16th Council of Carthage (418) it is stated that: "whoever says that Adam, the first man, was made mortal in the sense that he was to die a bodily death whether he sinned or not, which means that to quit the body would not be a punishment for sin but a necessity of nature,

anathema sit.” (21) Here we have a strict interpretation of the lost gift of immortality; modern theologians in later theological developments would prefer to give to the gift of immortality a broader meaning, lessening the aspect of bodily death and emphasizing that of spiritual death.

In 529, the 2nd Council of Orange, in its second canon, condemns anyone who “maintains that the fall harmed Adam alone and not his descendants, or declares that only bodily death which is a punishment of sin, but not sin itself which is the death of the soul was passed on to the whole human race by one man, “ and that “ he ascribes injustice to God and contradicts the words of the apostle: ‘Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men as all sinned in him’ (Rom. 5:12).” (22)

In 1546, the Council of Trent in its 5th session reiterates the previous condemnation of the Council of Orange (can. 2). It also condemns in its first canon “anyone who does not profess that Adam... offending God by his sin, drew upon himself the wrath and indignation of God and consequently death with which God has threatened him, and together with death captivity in the power of him who henceforth ‘has power of death.’” (23)

Regarding these classical teachings, we should keep in mind that the above statements are but the reflection of the theology of their times, and as such, time-conditioned in the manner of presentation and in the points of emphasis. In fact, Orange and Trent hold an intrinsic connection between Adam’s sin and our physical death without leaving a leeway for disagreement. Trent seems to take death in Romans 5 as physical death and this exegesis is not precise. Here death per se is seen strictly as penalty for original sin.

2.3.2.3 CONTEMPORARY APPROACH

Before the fall we see Adam in a state of original justice, which consisted in a union with God through grace which transformed man's whole spiritual being, penetrating even his bodily life (man created with a possibility of not dying) (24). This does not mean that if there were no original sin, man would have continued in perpetuity his biological life in time. Even without sin, man would have ended in some way his biological, historical life in space and time (25). However the end of man in paradise would have been a "death" without dying, a pure and active consummation of the whole man from within, without suffering from without, any violent dissolution of the actual bodily constitution.

After the fall of Adam, man lost the privileges of the state of original justice (26). However man retains his meta-physical entity. He has a soul (the substantial form) with specific powers and potencies: the mind and the will. He has a body (material element) with its proper powers and senses. As a composite of spirit and matter, he is still ordained to his proper natural end which is the highest object of knowledge and love, i.e., the Supreme Being (also the supernatural goal).

After the fall there still remains in man, as a real feature characterizing what he is, that vocation (supernatural goal) as a constitutive of the supernatural setting of human life. For in that previous supernatural setting (before the fall), man has a dynamic tendency to that perfection which would have made of his end a pure and experienced maturation from within (because the original gift of immortality was a connatural consequence of supernatural grace). But now, even when man is not in the state of grace, death is still something that ought not to be, because every sinner still retains his orientation towards grace and eternal life as a real ontological feature characterizing the human situation which contradicts death. so now, when man dies a death which overwhelms

him from without and dispossesses him utterly, he is dying a death which even now really ought not to be (27). It is this that causes the loss of Adam's immunity from death to be experienced as contrary to the concrete dynamic tendency of man as he actually is, and so gives the character of punishment. Man now experiences a death, the darkness of which is an expression and consequence and punishment of the perdition which ensues for him from Adam's sin. Death as we know it now, as part of man's constitution subject to concupiscence regarding its actual nature is a consequence of sin. (28)

2.3.3 DEATH: AN EXTRINSIC OR INTRINSIC EXPRESSION OF SIN ?

Does death as penalty for original sin, in some way represent a retributive intervention on the part of God, imposing a penalty not intrinsically related to the sin itself, or is death the expression of that sin flowing immediately from its very essence?

Death is not simply an arbitrary punishment for sin as one of the several possible ways of exacting justice. Death is intrinsically connected with the separation from God. If we were to examine the grace with which our first parents were endowed, we can see that the gift of immortality belonged as connatural consequence of the divinization of man by grace in the paradisaical condition. If man had not been called to the special intimacy with God that constitutes the supernatural order, then death, as a natural phenomenon, would not have bespoken any moral deviation from the divine will. But in the present order of things, human immortality could not remain where sin severed the root of that immortality in man's relationship to God; nor could that immortality have been lost so long as that root remained. Death is then an expression of the fact that the earthly reality of man is no longer permeated and transformed by grace. Death expresses the fact that grace must begin again so radically (as it were) the activity by which it transforms

earthly reality. This relationship between the earthly reality of man and grace really ought not to be, since it came about only through original sin and contradicts man's supernatural destiny. Thus, death which expresses this relationship is a punishment for sin in its essence. it is a punishment because it is a consequence and a connatural expression of the situation brought about by original sin. (29)

2.3.4 DEATH AS PUNISHMENT FOR PERSONAL SINS

Death is a punishment not only for original sin but for the sinner's actual mortal sins also. Here too, death is an intrinsic, essential expression and visible manifestation of these personal sins in the entire reality of man. It is not just a concrete human nature that is dying, but a unique human person. Death then would not be a mere accident suffered passively by man in the same manner and in the same quality. Rather, death is also an active consummation worked out throughout the whole of life. Thus death is an act of man. And so death will always be different for the just and the sinner even when the external event called death seems to be the same for all. For if a person by his own deliberate choice has ratified the alienation from God that his nature inherited from Adam, then he lives out his freely chosen separation from God in the moment of death as his own personal experience.

Our assertion that death is a penal consequence of personal sins is confirmed by a careful examination of the New Testament texts on death (confer Rom. 1:32; 6:16; 7:9-10; 8:13; James 1:15). St. Paul further confirms this by showing that there is a connection between God's law without grace, and death. Romans 7:7 depicts the situation of man at his best without Christ, i.e., man with the law, the situation of the Jews before Christ. Here man is deprived of Christ's grace, and so too was Adam. Man is sold to the power of sin, and so too was Adam. Man cannot not

commit sin, hence Adam too (concupiscence). Naturally man without the law is immeasurably worse off. Yet man at his best but without Christ is still a hopeless condition. The condition under this divine law, without the grace of Christ, becomes in fact the occasion of sin (1 Cor. 15:56) even though it goes against its proper, original and intrinsic intention. This condition provokes death as the consequence of this sin and brings it about by stirring up the sinful protest of man against it. Hence Paul asserts in Romans 5:12 that sin is potentially present in man because of Christ's absence and that this power called sin causes eternal separation from God, a separation called death. (30)

1.3.5 DEATH AND THE DEVIL

Sin always bears some relationship to diabolical influence. This is often referred to in the Bible (Heb. 2:4; Jn. 8:44; Wis. 2:24; Gen. 31; cf. DS 788). This is not because every temptation is directly from the devil, but man's original infidelity and loss of internal wholeness was occasioned by the devil's suggestion. It is this loss which continues to manifest itself in some way in all subsequent rebellion.

Fundamentally we can see this relationship clearer if we assume that the angels (the devil was originally one!), being pure spirits, have a fundamental relationship with the visible world springing from their very nature. This would consequently imply that their influence on the world is not sporadic, deriving from their own decision.

Having a pancosmic relationship of the essential kind to the world, the angel wills the perfection of the world because that reflects his own perfection and expresses it. Death can mean not only a termination, but also a consummation, and in this latter sense the angel wills it. As long as the angels remain in a state of grace, their grace-endowed nature would only express itself in

the world as willing that pure consummation which would have characterized the death-transcending end of man in paradise.

The fallen angel, however, wills the perfection of his essence in proud autonomy without grace. And so he also wills the perfection of the universe without grace. Consequently the fallen angel must will death as a consummation without grace of his own essence and of the world. This can be a reality for man only through man's free consent, in his quality as a free, spiritual being endowed with grace. By his consent, man wills his own graceless autonomous fulfillment. Therefore the will of the fallen angel for his own perfection and its expression in the world is in itself a temptation of man to a similar autonomous fulfillment without grace - a temptation to death. And so the devil, according to Hebrews 2:14, is the one who possesses the power of death. (31)

Each individual sin is a further extension of the devil's lordship and disorder, and the sinner when he dies makes this a stable and permanent condition. The death of the sinner withdraws him finally from the way in which God first wished to manifest Himself in him and to him. Thus death is the ultimate submission to the diabolical power.

2.4 SUMMARY

Death is absolutely universal. Everyone declares it natural and obvious that he must die. Yet a secret protest and horror for death finds itself in everyone. This is because in him is still that vitality of divine life longing for the supernatural goal. And this contradicts death.

That man dies is a consequence of original sin and all the sins through which every man makes his own the sin of Adam. This consequence is not merely punishment imposed by God and

exhibiting merely an external relationship to sin. It is sin that is manifested in death. Death does not mean exclusively material death of the body or the spiritual death of the soul but a total death as it afflicts man's entire person.

Salvation then must mean a transformation of man's mortal condition, a changing of death into life. Death can never be abolished but can be permanently transformed by the power of Christ.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 2 :

- (1) L. Bermejo, **LIGHT BEYOND DEATH**, Anand, India: Gurajat Sahitya Prakash, 1985, p.7.
- (2) K. Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," **QUAESTIONES DISPUTATAE 2**, N.Y.: Herder and Herder, 1961, p. 24.
- (3) M. Schmaus, **DOGMA 6: JUSTIFICATION AND THE LAST THINGS**, London: Sheed and Ward, 1977, p. 217.
- (4) Wright, "Death," **NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA**, Vol. IV, Washington: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967, p. 688.
- (5) Bermejo, op. cit., p. 13.
- (6) DS 101, 109a, 175, 413, 788f
- (7) C. Geffre, "Death as Necessity and as Liberty," **THEOLOGY DIGEST**, Vol. 12, n.3, 1964, p. 193.
- (8) Wright, op. cit., p. 688.
- (9) J. Dewart, **DEATH AND RESURRECTION**, Message of the Fathers, vol.22, Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986, p. 36.
The author does not elaborate on the view taken up by the Apostolic Fathers.
- (10) Ibid., p. 61.
- (11) Ibid., p. 70.
- (12) Ibid., p. 79.
- (13) Ibid., p. 83.
- (14) Ibid., p. 115.
- (15) Ibid., p. 123.
- (16) Ibid., p. 139.
- (17) F. Gustilo, **THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**, m.s. , Paranaque: DBCS, 1985, p. 46.
- (18) Ibid.

- (19) Dewart, op. cit., p. 164.
- (20) Gustilo, op. cit, p. 47.
- (21) Neuner and Dupuis, *THE CHRISTIAN FAITH*, Allahabad: St. Paul Press, 1978, n. 501., as translated from Denzinger (DS) 222: "Placuit omnibus episcopis... in sancta Synodo Carthaginensis Ecclesia constitutis: ut quicumque dixerit, Adam primum hominem mortalem factum ita, ut, sive peccaret sive non peccaret, moretur in corpore, hoc est de corpore exiret non peccati merito, sed necessitate naturae, anathema sit."
- (22) *Ibid.*, n. 505, as translated from DS 372: "Si quis soli Adae praevaricationem suam, non et eius propagini asserit nocuisse, aut certe mortem tantum corporis quae poena peccati est, non autem et peccatum, quod mors est animae, per unum hominem in omne genus humanum transiisse testatur, iniustitiam Deo dabit contradicens Apostolo dicenti: 'Per unum hominem peccatum intravit in mundum, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines (mors) pertransiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt,' (Rom. 5:12)."
- (23) *Ibid.*, n. 508, as translated from DS 1511: "Si quis non confitetur, primum hominem Adam, cum mandatum Dei in paradiso fuisset transgressus, statim sanctitatem et iustitiam, in qua constitutus fuerat, amisisse incurrisseque per offensam praevaricationis huiusmodi iram et indignationem Dei atque ideo mortem, quam antea illi comminatus fuerat Deus, et cum morte captivitatem sub eius potestate, 'qui mortis' deinde 'habuit imperium,' hoc est diaboli, 'totumque Adam per illam praevaricationis offensam secundum corpus et animam in deterius commutatum fuisse:' anathema sit."
- (24) The state of original justice gives to man supernatural and praeternatural gifts. Supernatural gifts include: 1) the state of special friendship with God; the submission of man's mind and will to God, 2) the gift of perfect science, 3) the gift of the submission of the world to man. Praeternatural gifts include: 1) the gift of immunity from concupiscence, where man exercises his faculties and tendencies according to that harmony and order brought about by the subordination of the lower faculties to the superior faculties, 2) the gift of immortality, whereby the natural condition of death is suspended.
- (25) K. Rahner, "Death," *SACRAMENTUM MUNDI*, Vol. 2, N.Y: Herder and Herder, 1969, p. 59.
- (26) The state of Man's fallen nature consists of: 1) the loss of the supernatural gifts, 2) loss of the praeternatural gifts of harmony and order, 3) loss of the special gifts of impassibility and impartiality, 4) loss of the personal gifts, of perfect science and of being lord of the universe, 5) presence of punishment: death, pain, suffering, state of misery, and hardships of life.

- (27) By sin, man never lost his ordination to a supernatural goal, though he lost the inner resources that would lead him to that goal. Hence, man always retained a basic ordination to immortality even in his body. The fear of death, then, is a reaction aroused by an instinctive awareness of an immortal destiny that may be lost to him.
- (28) K. Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op.cit., pp. 37-38, 47-48.
- (29) Ibid., pp. 48-49.
- (30) Gustilo, op. cit., pp. 44-45.
- (31) Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op. cit., pp. 52-54.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF DEATH

3.1 THE DEATH OF CHRIST

God was forever determined to save man. But that could not mean that He would erase death and then just pretend that man's sin had never happened. God's respect for created freedom and activity never allows him to act as if some actual event had never occurred. And so the fact of man's sin remains and the consequences of that fact remain also. However God can change the internal meaning of those consequences, provided that man too is willing to make those consequences work for his ultimate well-being instead of for his ultimate ruin. This change could not be simply a different way of looking at death from the outside. Rather the very nature of death must be changed intrinsically so that it leads to God and life rather than away from him to everlasting destruction.

And so, in order that death and the human condition may be transformed, God sent his Son into the world. The Word of God, through the incarnation in the womb of Mary, became of the same nature as we - subject to suffering and death by man's sin but sinless in himself (Heb. 4:15). And it was thus that he humbled himself to the point of obediently accepting death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

We must note, however, that from the circumstance that took place, we could not infer that the death of Jesus was salvific for they were in no way unique. Death on a cross,

the most terrible and most disgraceful form of execution, was frequent during Christ's time. Thus, to show that Jesus' death was salvific we have to turn to the testimony of Sacred Scriptures.

3.1.1 TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURES

3.1.1.1 THE SYNOPTICS

In the Synoptic Gospels we find that death did not come to Jesus as a fate he was unable to avoid. Death was something he had to meet consciously. In fact he prophesied three times that "the Son of Man had to suffer... be put to death, and rise three days later." The first time he said this was right after Peter affirmed Christ's messiahship (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22). The second time was when Jesus set out on the last journey to Jerusalem (Mt. 17:22; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44). The last prophecy was on the way to Jerusalem (Mt. 20:17; Mk. 10:32; Lk. 18:31).

Here we also find Jesus affirming the deeper meaning of his death when he says, "the Son of Man has come... to give his own life as a ransom for the many" (Mt. 20:28). And in the Last Supper, Jesus explains that his body would be given up for the sins of men and his blood shed for the remission of sins (Mt. 26:26f, Mk. 14:22f, Lk. 22:19f). (1)

3.1.1.2 ST. PAUL

The death of Jesus, along with the resurrection, forms the core of Pauline kerygma. Paul preaches the crucified Christ to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2) and to the Galatians (3:1, 6:14). Paul strives to counteract the scandal which the Jews see in Jesus' death and the

folly which the Greeks see in it, by testifying to death as an entry into the new Easter life (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Further he refers to the Old Testament message to witness to the fact that Christ has died for our sins in conformity with the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3).

The character of Christ's death as a sacrifice freely undertaken emerges when Paul reminds the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:23f) of the words of the Eucharist, according to which Jesus' body and blood are sacrificial. This further affirms that Jesus is the paschal lamb which has been slain. Paul sees also in this fact that the one sacrificed on the cross has entered into his personal history and in the history of the world, for Jesus Christ has given himself as a ransom for all (Rom. 8:32). Sin can no longer corrupt anyone who believes in him who raised Jesus from the dead, in him who was given over to death for our sins and raised up for our justification (Rom. 4:24f).

Paul, like the synoptic tradition, frequently states that Christ has died for men. In the New Testament, the short word "for" sometimes means "for the benefit of" and sometimes "in place of." The two meanings are therefore closely connected. In the second letter to the Corinthians, a kind of juridical representation is expressed: "One man died for all and therefore all mankind has died" (2 Cor. 5:14). As far as the closer connection of meaning between this and Jesus' sacrificial death is concerned, Paul describes it with the phrase "for our sins." Jesus gave himself for our sins (Gal. 1:3f). He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) because he wanted to expiate for these. (2)

3.1.1.3 HEBREWS

Faced by Jewish views that Christ's death on the cross was a scandal, the author of Hebrews set himself the goal of presenting Christ's death as part of God's plan of

salvation. He strives to do this through a typological treatment of sacrifice, a concept familiar to his readers, to explain the death on a cross in terms of fulfillment.

That the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New belongs to the divine plan of salvation is attested to by Jeremiah (31:31-34) where after the breaking of the old covenant by the human partner, God will set up a new covenant where, owing to the total renewal of the people through the forgiveness of sins, the Law will be inscribed in their hearts, making any external influence unnecessary.

Picking up from this concept, Hebrews describes the first covenant, ratified by Moses by the sprinkling of blood as defective and rendered obsolete by the new (Heb. 8:8-13). The new covenant is higher and eternal; it is established in virtue of greater divine promises, and its power to sanctify and save is procured through the death of Christ.

In the old covenant, the law of blood was in force: "According to the law... without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). But then these sacrifices were still unable to attain their end: God and salvation. Jesus is a priest in a new way - holy, innocent, without stain of sin, separated from sinners, and raised high above the heavens. And unlike the high priests of old he was under no new necessity of offering each day a sacrifice for his own sins and for those of the people; he did this once and for all when he offered himself up (Heb. 7:26f). He was offered once to take away man's sins (9:28; 10:12; 10:14). And so we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus once and for all (10:10). Thus the divine work for the salvation of men is brought to completion by this act (10:17f). However we must remember that Jesus suffering and death were not simply a material sacrifice in the old cultic sense. Jesus himself entered into the situation similar to that required of men, a situation lost in

catastrophe and alienation. Consequently, he too had to sustain himself in faith (Heb. 5:7-10). (3)

3.1.1.4 ST. JOHN

Like the Pauline writings, John's gospel proclaims Jesus as the Passover sacrifice. We find a foreshadowing in the Old Testament where Isaiah 53:6f foretells of the Messiah as God's "lamb that is led to the slaughter" who takes our pains upon himself. Consequently John the Baptist openly pointed to Christ in this way: "Look there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Jesus then is the paschal lamb of the New Covenant slain for the sins of the world (Rev. 5:12), who intercedes for us without ceasing, for he is the expiation of our sins and those of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). In this way we are certain of God's love that He sent his son as propitiatory sacrifice for our sins (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:10). In the book of Revelation, Christ is named 28 times as the "Lamb that was slain." He is the true sacrifice in which the OT sacrifices attain their meaning. (4)

3.1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The New Testament has given us different perspectives on Christ's death. However they seem to emphasize and converge on one central truth: Christ's death as the cause par excellence of redemption. But then the New Testament authors scarcely go beyond the statement of this mystery. The question of how the death of Christ is redemptive does not find a single clear explanation in the New Testament. The NT authors strive to illustrate various aspects of the mystery with comparisons to similar things in the

world of man. But these comparisons must necessarily be inadequate since none of them can exhaust the mystery. And so any one of these comparisons, if taken by itself and pressed to the limit, will give a distorted view of the mystery.

As a result of the variety of indications in Scripture, the saving value of Christ's saving death on the cross has been interpreted in manifold ways. As theology developed, the diversity of interpretations has been largely conditioned by the encounter of Christian faith with the modes of thought of a particular time and place.

The Fathers developed the teaching of the New Testament on the salvific death of Christ and posed problems seen by their times which did not occur to the Biblical writers. Borrowing from the idea of Paul (Rom. 5:12-18), Irenaeus thought of the "recapitulation" of all things in Christ. By this he meant that mankind regained through Christ what it lost through Adam. It was impossible for the fallen human race to renew itself and attain salvation; therefore, the Son of God became man and died to accomplish both these things. "God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man," (Against Heresies 3, 18, 7). (5) One hears echoes of Irenaeus' theory of recapitulation in the writings of Hippolytus and Tertullian. Irenaeus also developed what might be called the "exchange theory." This means that he saw the restoration of human nature in the fact that God the Son took our nature unto Himself. "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man... that man, having been taken into the Word and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God" (Against Heresies 3, 19, 1). (6) For Irenaeus then, the salvation of mankind is a reality because of the Incarnation and his theory has given a subordinate significance only to the Passion and Death of Christ.

At Alexandria, Clement spoke of Christ's laying down His life as a ransom on our behalf, redeeming us by his blood, and offering himself as a sacrifice. Origen, the disciple of Clement, thought of the death of Christ as a ransom paid to the devil who had acquired rights over mankind because of its sinfulness. In order to liberate mankind from this tyranny Christ gave his life to the devil as ransom price. But the devil was deceived, as he was not able to maintain for long his dominion of death over Christ. This idea was accepted with certain modifications by Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, and Leo the Great. They added that the devil lost his dominion over mankind by unjustly trying to extend this right to Christ also. Despite the fact that this error was widespread, Patristic teaching held firmly to the biblical teaching of man's reconciliation with God through Christ's death on the cross. This notion of dominion of the devil over fallen mankind was energetically refuted by Anselm of Canterbury. (7)

In the Middle Ages, the Germanic preoccupation with the idea of honor and dignity influenced St. Anselm of Canterbury in the development of his theory of "satisfaction" in his book "Cur Deus Homo?" (8). Anselm's theory reflected the relationship between the feudal lord and his vassal. According to this theory the moral acts of Christ, in consequence of the infinite dignity of his divine person, are of infinite value in spite of the fact that these acts in themselves, as acts of his human spiritual and free nature, or ontologically finite. Since the gravity of an offense is measured by the dignity of the person offended, the sin of a free creature is an infinite offense since it is directed against the majesty of God and cannot be "satisfied" by a mere creature. For the moral value of satisfaction is determined by the personal dignity of the person who offers the satisfaction. St. Thomas Aquinas completed this. he added that the sacrificial suffering of Christ is a

superabundant satisfaction which carries its value in itself prior to its acceptance by the Father (though for Christ's satisfaction to be effective, God's acceptance of it is necessary). St. Thomas however did not believe that the incarnation and death of Christ were absolutely necessary to reconcile God and man. God could have reconciled man to Himself in many other ways without sacrificing the demands of justice. In short he mitigated the "absolute necessity" of Christ's death by arguing that at least in theory, Jesus could have saved the human race by undergoing any act of suffering, even by shedding one drop of his blood. (9)

In its thesis of propitiatory sacrifice made by Christ, Scripture provides points of departure for the doctrine of satisfaction and atonement. hence it can be said that the teaching on this point developed by theology is sufficiently founded in Scripture to justify its acceptance by the Church. The Council of Trent included a reference to the mystery of satisfaction through Jesus' death on the cross in its teaching on original sin, on justification and on the sacrament of penance (10); however this mystery was presented not 'per se' but only in connection with the other statements of faith. We can thus maintain that the council's reference to it is not in itself a formal statement of faith but merely an inclusion of a subject lying in the general area with which the council was concerned.

3.1.3 THE NECESSITY AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S DEATH

Like Scriptures, the theory of satisfaction sees the redeeming act of Christ in his obedience, his love, and in his free acceptance of death. It remains questionable whether this concept adequately expresses the full reality of Christ's redemptive death. it does not

make it intrinsically clear why it was through Christ's death that we were redeemed and not through some other possible act of our Lord.

3.1.3.1 SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Certainly Scriptures emphasize that it was precisely through his death that Jesus redeemed us and not through any other moral act. "Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory" (Lk. 24:26). The passion predictions have the same tone: "The Son of Man must suffer... and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31). St. Paul too cites an early Christian creed with a note of necessity: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Furthermore Scriptures assert that we were freed and redeemed through the blood which Christ shed for us (Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:18f). It insists that the redeeming act was a bloody sacrifice in the ritual sense which essentially presupposes the death of a victim.

3.1.3.2 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

But even with the presence of today's many speculations about alternative possibilities in God's design of redemption for humanity, we can readily appreciate how the death of Christ was unavoidable in human terms. This can be done if we take the "must" of Calvary in the historical level.

At all times in the history of humanity, prophets have been persecuted for refusing to be moderate and accommodating and for faithfully transmitting some messages from God. Jesus was no different. His fidelity to his mission inevitably led to his being put to death. But then, it would have been unbecoming also for the Redeemer to simply die of old

age, or of a disease or to fall beneath the blows of an assassin. His high office as Savior of the human race demands that he should die a public death. And nothing could have been more conducive to the spread of his Gospel than his bloody martyrdom. There could have been no better proof of Christ's unswerving fidelity to his mission and service to others other than the "must" of his Passion and Death. (12)

3.1.3.3 THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Man, because of his nature, manifests something "uncompleteable", which points beyond himself to a manner of integration, undiscoverable to him by himself alone. In death this uncompleteability becomes obvious, because his descent into corruption destroys all hope of integration (13). Aware of this, man then strives towards "wholeness" which in reality surpasses and contradicts his nature (14).

Now in the fact that Jesus dies, something happens which is part of man's nature. But this is not to be understood as "pure nature" or "natura pura" (this does not exist in concrete!) (15). Here we speak of man's fallen nature under the power of sin. Although Jesus had no share in original sin, the human nature which he took as his own was human nature in that fundamental condition which was effected through the first sin and the inherited sin of man: he assumed "the flesh of sin" (Jn. 1:14f; Rom. 8:3f). It was only with this that man's nature could be transformed and be made capable of attaining that "wholeness" to which man strives for.

This is fittingly described by Hans Urs Von Balthasar:

The salvation event, by which man achieves a redemptive relationship with God, occurs in history, that God does not set a sign or speak a word to man, but uses man in all his existential doubtfulness and fragility and imperfectibility as the language in which he expresses the world of redemptive wholeness. God,

therefore, uses existence extended in time as the script in which to write for man and the world the sign of a supra-temporal eternity. (16)

Hence, "the man Jesus, whose existence is the sign and the Word of God to the world, had to live out simultaneously the temporal, tragic separating distance and its conquest through obedience to the choosing will of the Father, to realize the essentially irrefrangible wholeness within the essentially uncompleteable fragmentary." (17)

This means that Jesus entered human life in a situation in which that life would have to reach its fulfillment only by passing through death in all its obscurity. Since his life was inserted not outside of but within human history, death and suffering became inherent to it. Thus with the first moment of earthly existence Jesus was destined for death.

Christ's taking of death upon himself, in as much as in the actual order of things it is an expression and manifestation of the fallen state of creation, makes him experience in himself the darkness which is the specific character of human death and the deprivation of the personal consummation in void of the bodily end. Precisely in this death, Jesus suffered as the representative of the whole community of humanity, and in him the darkness and the deprivation of all self-directedness and all self-possession which takes place in every death was epitomized. His nailed hands and feet expressed his total powerlessness over self. Yet Jesus had anticipated in total self-surrender and in absolute liberty this extreme powerlessness in order to acknowledge before the world that life is in God's hands. The darkness and powerlessness experience in death implies that man cannot help himself in the face of death and there one finds himself alone. Jesus entered into this agony of loneliness in which no one could help him. The first man wanted to be independent of God. Jesus took it upon himself to embrace this element in the form of an experience of

isolation from God. Jesus submitted himself to this element of sin which isolates and imprisons man in his own ego in his abandonment by all as he hung upon the cross dying. That which took place in the death of Jesus was the peak and culmination of what he had acted out during his whole life. Viewed purely as a history, his life remained unfinished. He renounced self-development and the honor which is the normal harvest of a successful life. It was precisely in this darkness and deprivation of personal consummation which is characteristic of death that the death of Christ became the expression and the embodiment of his loving obedience, the free transference of his entire created existence to God. What was the manifestation of sin now became, without its darkness being lifted up, the contradiction of sin, the manifestation of a "yes" to the will of the Father. (18)

By accepting death in full loving obedience to the Father, Christ brought about a new historical situation. This willing submission to death was the synthesis and climax of the obedience he had offered the Father during the whole of his life. Death, whose inner nature had been filled with disobedience and rejection, was now in Christ suffused by love and submission. Christ's death manifested in the highest fashion his total self-surrender and self-giving, the uttermost proof of love. This adoring love, belonging as it did to a Divine Person, had within it the power to transfer Christ in his human nature into the divine sphere of immortal life and glory. Christ's total surrender in death was accepted by the Father who raised him from it and filled him with the undying life of the Holy Spirit. Death has now been swallowed up in victory. In Christ, death's meaning has now been totally transformed. Now it no longer means man's rebellion against God, but a sign of the presence of God's saving love in the world. Through his death, then, Christ formed his

obedience, humility, and love of God into a new force to be operative in history for all men of all time. (19)

3.1.4 CHRIST'S DESCENT TO THE UNDERWORLD

Christ's descent into hell was truly a descent into the very depths and to the most miserable form of human existence so as to rescue man from it. The first to receive its influence were those who had been removed from life before the Christ event but had hitherto been unable, owing to the reign of the powers of evil and destruction until then, to enter the companionship of God. They were now set free by Jesus, insofar as they had not conclusively turned away from God. This is what is meant in 1 Peter 3:18f., that Jesus went to the imprisoned spirits and made his proclamation to them (also 1 Pet. 4:6; Eph. 4:8). In this phrase later Christians found the point of departure for the belief that Christ's soul descended after death into Limbo (see the creeds since the fourth century, the Fourth Synod of Nicea, DS 429, Synod of Sens in 1140, DS 395). (20)

A closer examination of the New Testament brings us to discover that the descent of Christ into hell is not simply based on a soteriological act on behalf of the saved who lived before Christ and who, before his death, could not yet share in the vision (Mt. 12:40; 1 Pet. 3:18). It is also conceived as a feature emerging from the very essence of Christ's death, because it was a human death.

The Old Testament as well as the theology prevalent in the time of Jesus viewed the period in the lower world under a negative aspect, as implying the absence of the eschatological glorification of the body. Nevertheless since we considered death also a natural phenomenon, it cannot consist in something purely negative. A positive aspect in

the descent into "hell" could also be implicitly deduced. The basic images of "sheol" can be seen as "depth," something "underneath," something "more inward," and "radically one." So we may suppose in general that when we think of man entering the lower world, we can at least implicitly think of him as establishing contact with the intrinsic, ultimate and deepest level of the reality of the world. And so only in death, man enters into an unrestricted relationship to the cosmos as a whole. Death in some way opens to man the real ontological relationship of his soul to the world. Consequently applying this to the death of Christ, we can say that through Christ's death, his spiritual reality becomes open to the whole world thereby bringing a real ontological relation to it. When the vessel of his body was shattered in death, Christ was poured out over all the cosmos; he became actually, in his very humanity, what he had always been by his dignity, the heart of the universe, the innermost center of creation (Col. 1:16; Col. 1:20; Eph. 1:10). (21)

3.2 THE DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN

The traditional scholastic theological view based on the Council of Trent states that the death of the Christian in the state of grace no longer has the mark of punishment for sin, but like the concupiscence in the justified man, has the characteristic of a mere consequence of sin (*poenalitas sed non poena*), which is not abolished by God in order that it may serve for purifying the just. (22)

This describes death negatively and offers no explanation of what constitutes this death as positively as the death of a man in a state of grace.

3.2.1 DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN AS DYING IN THE LORD

In the New Testament there is a "dying in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:18), a death which is really no death at all since Christ says that everyone who lives and believes in him shall never die (Jn. 11:26). Here there is also a dying with Christ which is live-giving (2 Tim. 2:11; Rom. 6:8). We may content ourselves here with noting that according to the New Testament, the first step in the participation in the death of Jesus Christ begins in principle with faith and baptism as pointed out in Romans 6:1-11: "Through baptism into his death, we were buried with him, so that we too may live a new life..." But in order that the salvific principle of Christ's death may reach the individual, a personal surrender to Jesus Christ is required. When one, moved by living grace, gives himself over to faith in Christ, God imparts himself to him in the Holy Spirit. This equips man for his whole life, and especially for death in and with Christ. Our second assumption based on the New Testament is that the process of dying with Christ and obtaining new life, secretly dominated life here on earth (Rom. 6:6,11; 7:4-6; 8:2,6-12). These NT statements imply that the dynamic of Christ's death in the death of a man does not attain the height of its intensity suddenly; this climax has a long prelude during the whole life. This implies that physical death must be conceived as an axiological factor which dominates the whole of life and also as an action. If we do not wish to dissolve our dying with Christ in faith during this Christ-formed life into a merely idealistic conception, we must recognize that real death, even when viewed as final event of human life, is in the just a dying in Christ. Thus the death itself of a man in the state of grace is a saving event. Those who have died in faith are not "dead in Christ" only because they lived in Christ, but also because their dying itself was in Christ. Therefore death is the culmination both of the reception and the

effecting of salvation since death, as a human action, is precisely that event which gathers up the whole personal act of a human life in one fulfilment. (23)

3.2.2 CHRISTIAN DEATH: A TRIUMPH OF GRACE

We have so far pointed out the fact that the dying of a Christian is dying in Christ. But how does this take place?

As we have seen, what truly distinguished the death of Christ (in section 2.1.3.3. of this paper) is that: death, as the manifestation of sin, became in him an expression of grace. The emptiness of man became the advent of God's plenitude; death becomes life. In Christ, what of itself could have been the experience of sin became through his act which occurred in grace, something entirely different from what it appeared to be. Now, death, through being embraced by the obedient "yes" of the Son, while losing nothing of the horror of divine abandonment belonging to it, is transformed into the advent of God in the midst of loneliness. Death is now the manifestation of a complete obedient surrender of the whole man to God at the very moment when man seems far removed from Him. Through the fact of Christ's death, the justifying grace of God illustrates how grace prevailed at the very moment in which sin reached its fullest measure. And when Christ surrendered Himself to death, this grace became ours. Karl Rahner summarizes this point as: "His death, as an act of grace, helped to offer to God 'the flesh of sin' (which really death is) transforming it into a flesh of grace; so that we now can, through his grace, belong to God and to Christ in death, despite the fact that death, in itself, means remoteness from God." (24)

3.3 CHRISTIAN DEATH: THE CULMINATION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

The transformation of death in the case of the individual Christian is not just an automatic consequence of the dying and rising of Christ. It is the culminating result of the whole supernatural and sacramental life of the Christian whereby during life he opened himself to the divine power that was at work throughout all of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and continues to operate in His glorious humanity. This can be seen specifically in the development of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which constitute the essential activity of the supernatural life, and in the effect of all the Sacraments, with the possible exception of Holy Orders and Matrimony, which as sacraments of vocation are more directly related to the manner of Christian living in the world. (25)

3.3.1 DEATH: FULFILMENT OF THE LIFE OF GRACE (26)

The trinity of faith, hope, and charity makes death itself the highest act of believing, hoping, loving, the very death which seems to be absolute darkness, despair, and coldness itself. These three fundamental powers of Christian life, entering death, receive the mode which characterizes them in Christian life, that of submissive obedience: faith in darkness, hope against hope, and love of God who appears only as Lord and as inexorable justice.

3.3.1.1 FAITH

Faith is the basic activity of the supernatural life of grace. By faith man opens himself and responds to the saving revelation of Christ by an act of total acceptance of the ultimate meaning of his life in a destiny that exceeds his understanding. By faith man

orients himself toward a goal that lies beyond the visible confines of this mortal life. For the believer then, approaching death is approaching the veil that conceals the goal to which he has committed himself. The experience of death for a man of faith means the unveiling of the face of God. (27)

3.3.1.2 HOPE

Hope is the developing activity of the supernatural life. Here man meets the challenge of difficulty and his own weaknesses with an ever greater reliance on the divine goodness, power, and wisdom. This reliance in trial draws him continuously closer to God and causes the divine life to flourish with greater intensity. All the weaknesses that man experiences in life are concentrated in death. Without hope man can undergo death only in despair. And so, for the one whose entire trust and power is in God, death changes the assured confidence of hope into the joy of possession. (28)

3.3.1.3 LOVE

Love is the perfect, mature activity of the supernatural life. Here man responds to the loving initiative of God with an act of complete self-giving. he no longer lives to himself but to God. The process of the dispossession of self whereby a man endeavors to love God with his whole heart and mind and strength and will reaches its perfect realization in the unselfing event of death. For one who loves, this moment of dissolution is the moment of final consummation in which with Christ he delivers his spirit into the hands of God. (29)

3.3.2 DEATH: COMPLETION OF THE SACRAMENTS (30)

The personal encounter between God and man in Christ can only have an official, social, visible expression and embodiment in the Church, in the visible signs and rites established by Christ himself. And whenever a man opens himself to these sacraments, the grace of Christ becomes efficacious in the particular quality and direction signified by each sacramental rite. However their visible character does not embrace the whole of the Christian's life of grace since the latter is more extensive and is intended to transform the whole man. Yet the sacraments represent the visible form of the basic acts by which redemption is appropriated. All the sacraments derive their strength and efficacy from Christ's redemptive death. And so the sacraments make us partakers of Christ's death and consequently, make our own death a participation in his. And with this, what is begun in the reception of the sacrament is perfected in the experience of Christian death.

3.3.2.1 BAPTISM

Baptism plunges us into Christ's death, as St. Paul says in Romans 6:3. We are buried with him into his death (Rom. 6:4), through baptism, which is the semblance of his death. St. Paul conceives the effect of baptism as a sacramental assimilation to Christ's death (in baptism by immersion, the burial is also symbolized); in baptism, man dies to sin by mortifying in himself godless desires in order to live a holy life. St. Paul emphasizes that this dying-to-sin is not a mere metaphorical use of the term "death", rather

he means our participation in Christ's death through our own real death, which is enacted perpetually throughout our lives and consummated in the actual death of a Christian. Baptism as the beginning of Christian life is also the sacramental beginning of Christian dying. Baptism, therefore, is a preparation for a Christian's own death wherein that incorporation with Christ via the sacrament is made perfect and enduring. (31)

3.3.2.2 CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is the sacrament of Christian maturity. Through this gift of the risen Lord the Christian is empowered to bear witness in word and deed to the present reality of Christ's kingdom in the world. But nowhere is this witness more fully given than in death. For this reason those who undergo death for their loyalty in Christ are called martyrs, witnesses "par excellence." But this same witness which the martyrs give so strikingly is given also more prosaically but no less truly in the day-to-day living of the Christian life and in the confident acceptance of death at the end of this life. Every Christian who dies in Christ gives his life for the faith. Thus the mission he was entrusted with at Confirmation is thereby perfectly fulfilled. (32)

3.3.2.3 HOLY EUCHARIST

In the Holy Eucharist the reality of Christ's sacrificial act of dying and rising is made present here and now in our lives. When we celebrate the Eucharist we announce the

mystery of his death not only as the mystery of the Cross brought near to us, but as actually producing its effect on our lives. Of necessity, anyone who partakes of him in this mystery must also announce this death in his own life, by experiencing it in himself in the reality of his life. Through the Eucharist, men continually renew the dedication of their lives to God in union with Christ and are nourished by his glorified humanity for the daily living out of this dedication. In man's actual experience of death, this dedication is at length perfectly achieved. For this reason too, Church tradition has always considered the Eucharist as the sacrament for the dying, as the food for their journey through death to eternal life. (33)

3.3.2.4 PENANCE

Through the sacrament of penance, Christians regain the life they have lost through personal grave sin committed after baptism. Its special function is to render efficacious before God both the sorrow for these sins, and the works he does in union with Christ to make up for them. This sacrament, as its effects are prolonged in the Christian's daily life, not only protects him from future sins but transforms the sufferings and works of life into a power of renewal that effectively compensates for the disorder and offence of personal sin. This makes death itself in a special way a work of satisfaction and penance for past sins. Indeed, death perfectly accepted in union with Christ can mean the perfect appropriation of his dying in oneself through the sacrament of penance. This will complete the purification from sin and render purgatory unnecessary. This perfect acceptance of death in spirit of repentance is not primarily man's work, but God's work in man, produced through the

sacrament of penance received actually or in sincere desire to submit themselves to his economy of forgiveness and purification. (34)

3.3.2.5 ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Anointing of the sick manifests the relationship to Christ's death by the situation in which it is administered, the sickness of the body. For Scripture and for faith, sickness is not merely a biological process but a way to death. It is the visible manifestation of Satan's dominion over mankind as a result of the Fall, as well as of that weakness of man which is an expression of sin. Sickness is eminently a situation of decision between salvation and damnation, and this just at a moment when man, precisely because he is sick, is in danger of not meeting this situation properly. Hence divine grace in a visible sacramental form is needed to enable man to face this situation. In this time of special need, Christ comes to man in the Anointing of the Sick to raise up his heart and to strengthen him. The effect of this sacramental action is called "salvation." Here we refer to it as the Christian endurance of this decisive situation in life, either because bodily health is restored, or because he accepts his mortal illness in a Christian manner and endures death like a Christian. This sacrament makes the Christian endure the last trial of his life and perform the last act, his own death, in companionship with the Lord. Eventually death becomes for him a moment of final triumphant rejection of Satan's power because through the Anointing of the sick he has consecrated the end of his life to the death of Christ. (35)

3.4 SUMMARY

By dying, Christ has conquered death. Insofar as Christ has put on a flesh of sin, he has known the drama of human death. But in him, death has taken on a new meaning. What was the sign of sin has become the incarnation of loving obedience, the sign of total submission to God. Jesus Christ has saved us from sin by his inexhaustible love and obedience, but we need to specify by what precise act of love and obedience. In the concrete it is the love and obedience that consisted precisely in the act of dying.

For a Christian, then, death becomes a way of salvation in union with Christ's redemptive death. This implies that a Christian faces his death as a loving submission and complete surrender to the will of the Father, that the Christian may share not only in Christ's death but also in his resurrection.

However, "dying in the Lord" is not something attained suddenly. Rather it is the culminating result of the whole supernatural and sacramental life of the Christian, begun in faith and in baptism, and intensified through the other sacraments and virtues.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 3:

- (1) M. Schmaus, DOGMA 3: GOD AND HIS CHRIST, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1984, p.68.
- (2) Ibid., p. 69.
- (3) Ibid., pp. 70-72.
- (4) Ibid., p. 73.
- (5) E. Gratsch, PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY, New York: Alba House, 1981, p. 97.
- (6) Ibid.,
- (7) L. Ott, FUNDAMENTALS OF CATHOLIC DOGMA, Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1974, p. 168.
- (8) G. O' Collins, INTERPRETING JESUS, Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983, pp. 149-150.
- (9) Ibid., p. 96.
- (10) DS 1513 (original sin), DS 1689 (penance), DS 1522, DS 1528, DS 1576, DS 1582 (justification).
- (11) O' Collins, op. cit., p. 96.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) M. Redfern, ed., THEOLOGIANS TODAY: HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, London: Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1972, pp. 82-83.
- (14) Ibid., pp. 79-82.
- (15) State of pure nature: a metaphysical consideration of man which includes the elements that correspond to man and that define him as a specific entity. The elements include: 1) substantial form, the soul with specific powers and potencies of the same, i.e. mind and will, 2) material element, the body, also with its proper powers and senses, 3) man ordained to his proper end which will be the highest object of knowledge and love, i.e. God, the Supreme Being, (cfr. Gustilo, op. cit., p. 48).
- (16) Redfern, ed., op. cit., pp. 101-102.
- (17) Ibid., p. 102.

- (18) Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op. cit., pp. 61-62.
- (19) Schmaus, DOGMA 6: JUSTIFICATION AND THE LAST THINGS, op. cit., p. 218.
- (20) Rahner, "Death," op. cit., p. 61.
- (21) Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op. cit., p. 67; cfr. also DS 792.
- (23) Ibid., pp. 68-70.
- (24) Ibid., p. 71.
- (25) Wright, op. cit., p. 690.
- (26) Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op. cit., pp. 71-72.
- (27) Wright, op. cit., p. 690.
- (28) Ibid.
- (29) Ibid.
- (30) Cfr. Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," op. cit., pp. 73-79, and also Wright, op. cit., pp. 690-691.
- (31) Ibid.
- (32) Ibid.
- (33) Ibid.
- (34) Ibid.
- (35) Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF DEATH

4.1 AN ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH'S MYSTERY

Eschatology deals with the final circumstances towards which the history of mankind and the life of each individual are directed. From the previous chapters we have seen how death is a consequence of sin and an event of salvation through Christ's dying. With these, two things become clear to us in the light of eschatology. Firstly, death is the decisive moment in every man's life; it is at this moment when our irrevocable lot is fixed. Death ends the period of probation during which man may freely turn away from or turn to God as his last end. After death, man's condition is eternally fixed either for joy or for misery depending on whether he died in Christ or in Adam. Secondly, the natural essence of death must be such that it is open either to meaning of loss or meaning of salvation. Consequently this involves the necessary cooperation of man's liberty in his salvation or damnation.

Certain questions then arise which seek a clearer eschatological understanding of the mystery of death: why is death the decisive event in human existence? What is death in itself that it can be either salvation or condemnation for man? And at the moment of death when man made a free decision for or against God, how was this irrevocable decision arrived at? We do not say that we have a ready answer and an infallible solution to these

queries for no one who has died has come back and verified the answers posed to these question. Thus we would merely like to present some well-founded attempts that might in one way or another shed light to our eschatological understanding of the mystery of death.

4.2 FINALITY OF DEATH

4.2.1 TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN VIEW

Sacred Scriptures hold that after the moment of death, we can no longer decide for or against God, but that the decision we make in life remains forever definitive. (1) This belief can be traced back from patristic writings where it is said that the dead "rest in peace" or that they "live forever with God." In fact there are many instances in the Acts of martyrs where the day of martyrdom was called the day of birth or the day of entry into the glory of God. (2)

On the contrary, Origen proposed in his theory that "after death, God offered man still another chance of conversion, and that on his part man would be unable to remain in opposition to God when the truth became apparent to him" (3). The Church, of course, has rejected this doctrine of "universal restoration" (Apocatastasis) repeatedly. (4)

The Church has always emphasized that "death creates a condition of finality. In death man leaves the condition of the way and enters into that of the end" (5). With bodily death, man's state of pilgrimage comes to a definite end. And after the moment of death, there is no longer any possibility of deciding for or against God but that the decision made during life and especially in that concentrated moment of death remains forever final, definitive and unalterable. The Church holds on to this doctrine as a proposition of faith (6). This doctrine of faith does not totally exclude man's further development after death,

nor does it presuppose a lifeless concept of man's future life with God (7). It emphasizes earthly life as truly historical, unique, unrepeatable and of inalienable and irrevocable significance. Thus there can be no eternal return of all things; there is only a history happening once and for all. There can be no reincarnation and no migration of souls for which every life is only a provisional attempt open to complete revision to a later date, which in turn, for better or worse, may be repeated. Man does not share the incessant ebb and flow of the cycles of nature, which, in appearance, repeat themselves endlessly. (8)

4.2.2 METAPHYSICAL VIEW

The attempt to explain the finality of death in the light of Christian tradition leads us to another problem. Karl Rahner poses it in this manner: "(Is) the definitive character of the freely produced expression of man's personal existence an intrinsic, essential constituent of death or... is it merely linked with death by God's free decree?" (9)

To explain the finality of death as God's free determination is suspect. It is strangely inconsistent with the revelation of divine mercy to affirm that God refuses the grace of forgiveness and repentance to persons who are still intrinsically capable of accepting it. Hence it is quite unsatisfactory to say that sinners who have died are confirmed in their sinfulness only because God is no longer willing to have mercy on them. Death itself must somehow confirm sinners in their aversion from God in a way that God's mercy no longer reaches them not because he is unwilling to give them the grace, but because He is unable to, on account of the intrinsic situation itself. Hence it must be the nature of death itself, and not merely an extrinsic free decision of God, that makes this moment irrevocably decisive for the eternal destiny of each man. This is an opinion which

can be traced to St. John Damascene and which has the weighty support of St. Thomas Aquinas. (10)

To discover why death by its nature is the finally critical event in human existence, we must analyze the condition of spiritual human activity in the present state of union of body and soul, and what follows from a separation of that union. (11)

In man's condition of mortal life all his vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual processes are integrated into a life of choice, whereby he selects his goals and directs himself to them. So long as man makes his choice as a spirit-matter composite, his most solemn and total dedication to a goal lacks perfect interior stability... Even in his commitment to what he deems his highest good, his choice remains intrinsically reformable. (12)

Man's intellectual and volitional life is directly dependent in its functioning upon his sense life, which is in continual contact with ever-changing material reality. this contact makes man's imagination shift frequently from one thing to another. This shifting causes a shift in intellectual attention as well as a possible shift in the intention of the will. This shift in the will need not take place, but then it is always possible so long as man's dedication depends on a kind of knowledge which is continually changing its point of view. hence as long as man's spirit is directly subject to the conditions of time and space in its activity, he may always revise his judgment about his life's goal.

But once separated from matter, the human spirit is no longer dependent on the mutability of material conditions. The goal that it has freely determined on as its last end remains unchangeably the first principle of all subsequent choice and activity. This goal has become for the soul the supreme good to which it has dedicated itself with the full force of its personality, with full intellectual clarity and total attention. The commitment to the end is now from within irreformable. (13)

And so this end is now willed for its own sake alone. In fact, if there is something else that may be later willed, it must always be in some way willed for the sake of this end. Thus

the soul has now determined forever, from within, its essential and fundamental orientation in activity.

4.3 THE LAST DECISION IN DEATH

The basic decision for or against God which man makes in death is final and irrevocable. This is not because God does not allow him to change his mind, but as we have seen, it is because the concept of "changing one's mind" is not congruent to the nature of a freed spirit. But then, how is this basic decision at the moment of death reached? Does man make one final last decision that is free, full, conscious and decisive for his final destiny only at this moment of death, or is his free and final decision shaped up by the total summation of all the free acts and decisions he has made during his lifetime?

Many theologians hold diverse opinions. Some are inclined to think that this act made in the instant of the separation of soul from body has all the qualities of a perfectly free act as expounded by the "hypothesis of a final decision" (*Final Option Theory*). On the other hand, others argue that the choices made daily during one's lifetime eventually shape up into a fundamental decision for or against God at the moment of death. Thus the "summation of free choices" made earlier in life sums up man's last irrevocable decision (*Summation of earlier free acts theory*).

4.3.1 FINAL OPTION THEORY

Ladislaus Boros states clearly the hypothesis of a free final decision (option) as:

Death gives man the opportunity of posing his first completely personal act, death is therefore, by reason of its being, the moment above all others for awakening of consciousness, for freedom, for the encounter with God, for the final decision about his eternal destiny. (14)

Man in the instant of death makes a definitive decision about his destiny. This last act, the definitive stabilizing of his personal choice, is fixed for eternity. It does not precede nor follow but occurs at the very moment of death where this final free act would not be frustrated by the dimness of the human faculties which ordinarily precede death. "It is only at this timeless instant of death, which is the non-temporal demarcation line between the last instant of life and the first instant of afterlife, that man could make a choice in perfect consciousness, with an infinitely better knowledge of everything than one can obtain during life." (15)

The main argument offered in support of this view is that death must be seen as something active as well as something which is passively endured by man; and if death is an act then it must be the most important human act of all and must recognize man's freedom to the fullest extent. (16) Life is a preparation for death and this final deciding act at the moment of death sums up all that is deepest in man's life. Thus death coincides with the first fully personal act of man. However this final option is not unrelated to all the acts preceding it but is at once the fruit and the manifestation of all the imperfect actions by which a man has developed a moral personality. We can count on the fact that in the moment of death, the effects of a lifetime of striving towards God are brought together in the dying man's final, intrinsic act of surrender. But although the previous acts may orient in a way this final decision, it is still theoretically possible, according to this theory, that one could make a last decision contrary to the previous choices made in life. Based on the saving power of God's grace, it is not unthinkable that in the final hour of agony, the man who had rejected God during his life might accept the divine self-communication. Such a

reversal of the decisions of a whole life of opposition to God would call, in the last moment, for a heroic expenditure of energy; but if it should take place, all earlier acts of this man's life would receive their final determination from that last act. The man of faith, who need not accomplish such reversal, will far more easily overcome the dangers of this last hour and thus attain through a final decision what was being prepared for by all the trials and struggles of his earthly life. (17)

This theory also proposes a solution to the problem of the salvation of non-Christians and unbaptized children. In this final option they could receive faith and be justified by God's grace without baptism, when at his moment of death they choose God as their last end. (18)

4.3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE FINAL OPTION THEORY

The arguments we have presented in favor of the final option hypothesis, though persuasive, are not without its limitations. They lack support in Scripture. Scripture seems to suppose that a man is finally judged and his eternal lot is determined by the deeds and choices he has accomplished and made during his life. Nowhere can we find the final determination of the soul's last choice in the instant of death. St. Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians 5:10 writes: "The lives of all of us are to be revealed before the tribunal of Christ so that each one may receive his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body."

Another limitation of this theory is that Catholic doctrine holds that all infants who die after baptism are saved. But this theory posits that they could still freely choose their

final destiny at the moment of death. Then in that case there seems to be no explanation in this hypothesis why some of them could choose to reject God. (19)

O' Connell, in a critique of the final option theory, rejects Boros' position on the non-temporality of the moment of death. he argues that between the "before death" and "after death" there is really no interval of time in which a final decision can take place:

He (Boros) says that since "death" is not a moment in a temporal succession but "as it were, a line of demarcation between two moments without any temporal extension of its own," therefore "this only means that the last moment before the break and the first after it merge into one another... Therefore the moment of death, the transition itself, is - when looked at the subsequent condition - the last moment of the preceding condition, and when viewed from the preceding condition - the first moment of the succeeding condition (20)." This answer in terms of time is confusing and also perhaps misleading as to Boros' real meaning. What is ultimately at issue are two things, not three: the state of union of soul with mortal body, such that man's personal activity is always that of an embodied spirit; and the state of separation of soul from mortal body (whatever may be said of an immediate passage of the soul to union with a new body, whose character is determined by the choice made by man "in dying"). There is no third thing, that is, a transition as something in between... There is really no sense in which the "last moment before the break and the first after it merge into one another," no sense in which the "moment" of "separating" can be viewed as the "last moment of the preceding condition" (that is, of union of soul with mortal body). The moment of separating is identifiable only as the first moment of the succeeding condition. (21)

Furthermore, man's definitive activity for reaching union with God should take place also in union with the Church. For this reason, the mystical Body of Christ is represented as the Ark of Salvation, and as means of attaining eternal life. Consequently man's basic decision for God should take place while he is still a member of the visible Church and not in a non-temporal moment. (22)

4.3.3 AN ALTERNATIVE: THE SUMMATION OF MANY FREE ACTS

For some other theologians, the emphasis is based more on their reflection on man's temporality and historicity as the context in which a genuine personal freedom matures. And so, for them, the act of the soul in the moment of death, in which the liberty of man is thereafter forever fixed upon a particular last end, is not free in the sense that it could be otherwise, given the concrete history of the individual who is placing the act. It is free in the sense of being wholly spontaneous, not constrained or determined by anything outside the soul, but springing totally from what the soul has become during life and expressing perfectly the character that has been formed by the many free acts and choices that have been placed during one's mortal life. Of course, it embodies the radical orientation of the will that was last freely adopted by the person in an act occurring before the moment of death (a free act which falls in a special way under the loving and wise providence of God). The appeal of grace in this moment may be extraordinarily strong, but the free act made before death is qualitatively the same as any free orientation made in the course of life. God's special concern for man at the actual moment of death does not mean that death always occurs in circumstances positively willed by God. Some people die at a particular time because of either malice or negligence of others, which God does not positively will. However what is sure is that God's grace will always be there to make death a salvific event, unless the person by his previous choices has so hardened his heart as to place himself beyond the reach of God's mercy and love. The final act of the will, then, that emerges in this moment of death is but the necessary fruit of all man's free responses to divine grace, and most especially to that last grace intended by God to bring man to Himself. (23)

In the final option theory the most one can say of the choices of life is that they prepare and condition one for the final choice. But the truth is that every major decision of man tend to build up a character and a character cannot easily be changed in the course of our short lives. So man's action is not "*merely-provisional*" but rather "*provisional-but-tending-towards-a-goal-which-is-not-provisional*." Furthermore though each decision is provisional in itself our situation is such that any particular decision may lose its provisionality by the intervention of death as soon as the decision is made. So human decisions are more accurately described as "*provisional-in-nature-but-liable-to-be-de-facto-final*." (24)

In addition, the final option theory tends to judge human morality by a standard which applies more to a pure spirit. In fact it refuses to take seriously the reality of time. But then a human person is an embodied spirit and as such he is a spirit extended in time as well as space. Though not all of "what he is" is accessible to the conscious inspection of the person at any given instant, all of "what he is" has an influence on him, even on his deepest spiritual choices. For example, if a man is confronted with a choice between a generous act and a selfish one, then the resulting choice would be one intimately affected by the character he has built up by his previous choices, even though he has already forgotten these past choices and is not particularly aware of its influence. This then is the kind of freedom exercised by an embodied spirit in a world affected by sin. And so, if these earlier decisions are truly significant as human and free, then the final option is unnecessary, or else if it is held that the final option is necessary because the earlier decisions are not fundamentally significant, then human life would have no real meaning.

(25)

4.3.4 POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

We cannot deny that there is a real difference between the two theological opinions on the nature of the act of the soul in the moment of death. But we could not just exaggerate the differences. In fact, both agree that this final act at the moment of death depends profoundly upon the prior choices made while the soul is in the state of union with the body. If one position says that these prior choices do not wholly and necessarily determine the final act from within, this is not said to encourage sinners to put off their repentance and plan to fix things up at that last instance of freedom, but to make a man unequivocally assume full responsibility for the answer he makes to God's grace. Both agree also that in this act man becomes definitely himself, and that in this moment his preparation is joined intrinsically to divine fulfillment or to the emptiness of sin that remains forever. Finally, both agree that the state that follows death does not derive its essential immutability from an extrinsic, free decree of God, but from the very nature of death and the activity elicited by the soul in the moment of death. (26)

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A human existence that has passed through death has reached a final state in which no further change is possible in its basic tendency. Death makes human decision irrevocable. One's decision as regards God now becomes final, permanent, and unchangeable. "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." The finality of this state obtains not only in the reprobate - those who have turned away from God and can no more come back to him and in the blessed - those who are turned towards God and can no more abandon him, but also in those who are destined to the place of purification - whose

movement towards God can no more be diverted, the finality as of the closed file and the definitely settled matter.

But how are we to account for the inalterability of human existence after death?

Some hold that the finality of the last state is due to the fact that God has willed that at death man's time of probation should end. But this is nothing but a statement of what happens, not of why it happens. When God wills a thing, his will always has an immanent terminus in its object. Thus a metaphysical explanation many hold to explain this immanent ground of the final determination of our existence consists in the demonstration of the immanent appetite for being of the human will. At the moment of death, when matter is separated from the spirit and the latter is freed of the former, the will chooses and commits itself to the end. This commitment now becomes irreformable from within. The end to which the will has committed itself is now willed entirely for its own sake alone and whatever else may later be willed can only be willed for the sake of this end.

The arrival to this irrevocable willing of the end is explained by the "final option theory" and the "summation of earlier free acts theory." The former emphasizes the importance of the final decision at the moment of death, whereas the latter emphasizes the earlier free choices in life which shapes up the final decision. Although these theories vary in their emphasis, they make us realize the value of a life well lived and in anticipation of death, as well as the value of God's miraculous grace at the moment of death.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 4:

- (1) Jn. 9:4; Lk. 16:19-31; Mt. 25:1-13; Gal. 6:9; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Mt. 10:28.
- (2) Schmaus, DOGMA 6: JUSTIFICATION AND THE LAST THINGS, op. cit., p.222.
- (3) Ibid., p.223.
- (4) This theory of Apocatastasis was condemned by the Council of Constantinople (DS 211), the Benedictus Deus (DS 530f), and by the Council of Florence (DS 593).
- (5) Schmaus, op. cit., p. 222.
- (6) DS 457, 464, 493a, 530, 693.
- (7) Schmaus, op. cit., p. 224.
- (8) Ibid., pp. 223-224.
- (9) Rahner, "On the Theology of Death," p.29.
- (10) Ibid., p. 30; crf. also: Thomas Aquinas, S. Th., Suppl., 69, 2, Resp.
- (11) D. Dorr, "Death," THE FURROW, Vol. 19, n.3, march, 1968, pp. 141-142.
- (12) Wright, op. cit., pp. 692-693.
- (13) Ibid., p. 693.
- (14) L. Boros, THE MOMENT OF TRUTH, London: Search Press, Ltd., 1965, p. 84, 165. Claude Geffre in "Death as necessity and Liberty," op. cit., reviews the theory in relation to the Church's teaching on merit, heaven and hell, and Christ's redemptive death. Other proponenets of this theory are: R. Troisfontaines (I DO NOT DIE, New York: Desclee, 1963), R. Gleason ("Toward a Theology of Death," THOUGHT, Vol. 32, 1957-58, pp. 34-68), M. Eminyan (THE THEOLOGY OF SALVATION, Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1960), P. Glorieux ("Endurcissement Final et Grace Dernieres," NOUVELLE REVUE THEOLOGIQUE, Vol. 59, 1932, pp. 856-892).
- (15) Ibid., pp. 4-8, 23. Boros gives a lengthy discussion on the non-temporality of the "moment of death" for making a completely personal decision.
- (16) Dorr, op. cit., p. 145.

- (17) Cfr. Schmaus, op. cit., pp. 221-222; also Geffre, op. cit., pp. 193-194.
- (18) Geffre, op. cit., p. 194; also Dorr, op. cit., p. 145.
- (19) Wright, op. cit., p. 694.
- (20) Boros, op. cit., p. 5.
- (21) M. O' Connell, "The Mystery of Death," THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, Vol. 27, n. 3, September, 1966, p. 436.
- (22) Wright, op. cit., p. 694.
- (23) Ibid
- (24) Dorr, op. cit., p. 146.
- (25) Ibid, Cfr. also O' Connell, op. cit., pp. 434-442. Fr. O' Connell poses a similar dilemma and accuses Boros of looking for an angelic rather than a human decision.
- (26) Wright, op. cit., p. 694.

CONCLUSION

We have spoken much of death, yet we have said very little. Death, as it has always been, will remain an ineffable mystery of our human existence. we can never fully fathom or exhaust its meaning. Though it is certain that our biological existence would terminate, it has never been clear how, where and when we shall meet death. it is a factor totally beyond our control. it is a mystery which escapes our fullest comprehension. But though it is not fully comprehensible, we should never ignore it. After all, man is a "being-towards-death." Since death is a fundamental modality of human life, our existence necessarily carries death within itself.

Our life is a movement towards death. And so, we must never lose sight of it. Already here and now we must weigh our life day by day on the scales of death with a view of one being able to die his own death. To live, then, is to learn the inward serenity of one who can in all calmness go to meet death because he is ready to accept its mystery and unfathomable significance.

This inward serenity is difficult for the atheist or fatalist. He sees death as an end he has achieved. For him life has no reasonable destiny. Being so, the unbeliever lives trying to get the most out of his earthly existence and at the same time cursing the imminent day of his impending death since it would put a total stop to all that he has begun and achieved. For him, then, the mystery of death has nothing to offer.

On the other hand, the Christian sees death as a mystery of God. And in order to understand this mystery and to translate it into the liturgy of life, he realizes the need to contemplate the death of his Crucified Savior. It is in this death of Christ that he finds the meaning and courage to die well - to accept death's unfathomable mystery.

Jesus Christ was not only put to death, but he himself died. Death was not an inevitable end that Jesus resigned himself to but was a way he willingly chose. In so doing, he made death his own act of loving surrender to the Father, and he accepted what was humanly beyond control. The mystery of Christ's death has brought salvation and divine life and glory into this world. It has also raised and transformed this human tragedy, towards which we all reluctantly move, into God's mysteries. Christ's salvific death has made human death the most important and decisive event in each person's life. The stark reality of death continues to haunt us. But now, we can die this death peacefully because the assurance offered us by Jesus can now become ours. The anguish and incomprehensibility of our own death can now be a sharing in that death Jesus endured. Thus Christ has become the prototype of those who die.

As Christians, we too must resolve to follow in his death. This implies that we must become more and more assimilated in Christ throughout our life that He may be so during the moment of our death. This conformation to Christ's death is anticipated in our

Christian life of faith, hope, and love, and all the worship of the sacramental life of the Church, which reaches its full maturity in this complete submission of the Christian together with Christ. For as the paschal mystery of our Lord becomes more and more expressed in our life, our death becomes the moment of our final appropriation of Christ's own life and death.

With such an understanding of Christian death, we actually need not fear its coming yet the fact remains that because of death's awesomeness we still, in a way, anticipate it with fear. This element of fear is liable to be even stronger in a believer than in the atheist or fatalist. The unbeliever has resolved to his own satisfaction the problem of what comes after death and is chiefly disturbed by the knowledge that he must abandon a work he has begun and leave it unfinished. On the other hand, we Christians see death as the moment of our encounter with God. It is that moment towards which we have been journeying, in an anticipation never free of tension, during our whole lifetime. As we await the final judgment of God, we can overcome our anxiety only in a loving confidence. Christ himself exhorts us: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me" (Jn. 14:1). This exhortation to have confidence in the Father and in himself is made explicit when he says: "Love has no room for fear; rather perfect love casts out all fear" (1 Jn. 4:18). When we come to realize that the death that crushes is but the tender clasp of the God that loves, it looses all its terrors. So in the face of death, there must remain for us, Christians, only trust and hope with which to meet the unavoidable fear of death.

In the last analysis it is then our conception of death that answers all of life's questions. To conceive death in the light of faith makes us believe that Christ's own death and resurrection has altered the meaning of death. Christ has transformed death and has

given it a new and changeless character. This means that the Christian no longer sees death as a sting but as a victory, no longer the termination of our existence but the birthday of our eternity, no longer a parting but the union of a friend to the Friend, and no longer the dead end of life's road but the passage into a new, eternally human life.

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